Fowl Feathered Review
№ 204

THE SPRING WOUND MAMMOTH
100
YEARS OLD
PANCAKE COALITION

Issue № 204: *Unspooling the Verdant Volition: A Communiqué on Cultivating Consequence*

Fowl Feathered Review is a quarterly, a disordered artifact of the human impulse to categorize and consume the ephemeral. Produced by the Springwound Mammoth Pancake Coalition—an entity distinct from its waffle-centric counterpart—it is birthed under the Fowlpox Press imprint. Virgil Kay, its editor, presides over this enterprise from a paper canoe adrift on the Passagassawakeag, a river of dubious depth and even more dubious inhabitants. Surrounded by featherheads and their aquatic card games, Kay's reign is absolute, his word the final arbiter in the transformation of boastful souls into doormats. Layout and visual conceits are the province of Cookie Granola, while melodrama and histrionics fall under the purview of Childe Harold. Silent Bill, in his characteristically taciturn manner, provides necessary pauses. The review's structural integrity, or lack thereof, is the domain of Unkie Bob, whose talents extend to the mitigation of typographical errors and the prevention of electrical conflagrations. Everett Enótita serves as Kay's indispensable amanuensis, and the Ecum Secum Literary Brain Trust, in a gesture of dubious beneficence, offers nominal financial support. Printed upon the verdant expanse of Bald Porcupine Island, and laced with the enigmatic Kraa, a bioengineered culinary enigma, the Fowl Feathered Review remains a testament to human ingenuity, or perhaps merely a symptom of cultural decline. ISSN: 1929-7238.

"I am an observer of life, a non-participant who takes no sides. I am in the regimented society, but not of it."
--Moondog, The Viking of 6th Avenue

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If this magazine does not meet your expectations,
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for a full refund, minus the cost of enlightenment.

Submissions

Fowlpox Press: A Submission Guide for the Determined (or Deluded) To the Aspiring Artist (or Sandwich Enthusiast):

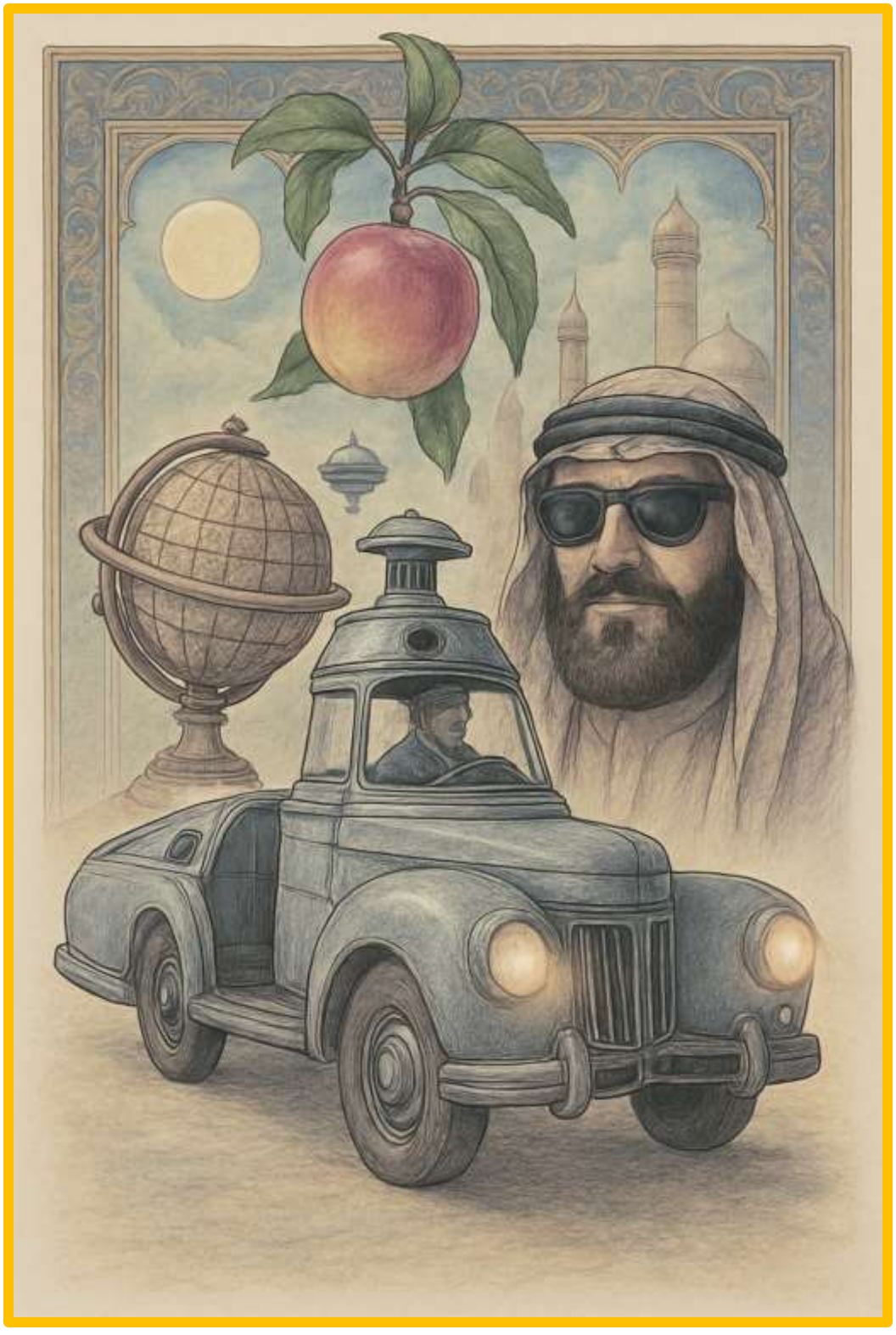
1. **Craft** (or **Culinary Construct**): 2-227 poems, a numerical range that hints at both ambition and a troubling lack of self-editing, may find their way to our digital doorstep (fowlpoxpress@mail2poet.com). Alternatively, for the visually inclined, paintings numbered 2-953 (a prolific career, or perhaps a basement overflowing with forgotten canvases?) are welcome. We are also, inexplicably, open to submissions of twelve-inch sandwiches.
2. **The Gatekeeper:** Address your offerings to Virgil Kay, Editor. In posession of remarkably discerning taste, or so he believes, Virgil is a rooster of some renown, a creature of instinct and inexplicable confidence. His title, "China Wok Habitue," suggests a broader palate than one might expect from a bird, though it's more likely a testament to the local takeout joint's generous portions. (**Please note:** Include a bio, a desperate plea for recognition that will likely join the unread masses in the digital purgatory of our slush pile.)
3. **Format:** Poems, those valiant attempts at capturing the human experience in meter and rhyme, should be attached in a Word document or PDF. Paintings, windows into your soul (or a weekend spent with Bob Ross reruns), must be submitted in JPEG, TIFF, or a format our aging technology can comprehend. Jokes, if they exist, should be delivered in MP3 format. We are, alas, not equipped to handle the nuanced art of the live performance. Sandwiches, a curious offering in the realm of artistic expression, require clear plastic wrapping and a small packet of Kewpie Mayonnaise. (**Pro-tip:** The Kewpie packaging is, undeniably, a work of art in its own right, and we encourage you to admire it before consumption.)
4. **The Cycle Continues:** We exist in a perpetual state of acceptance and rejection. A Sisyphean task, some might say. We receive submissions 365 days a year, a testament to the relentless hope, or perhaps blissful ignorance, of aspiring artists. However, with a heavy heart (and a full crop), we must inform you that rejections also occur 365 days a year.
5. **The Sandwiches:** Ah, the sandwiches. These, unlike your artistic endeavors, find a permanent home within our editorial sanctum. Virgil, in his infinite wisdom, has determined that a diet rich in carbohydrates is essential for maintaining his regal demeanor.
6. **Leap Year Follies:** Leap years, those extra days gifted by the whims of the calendar, offer no reprieve. Aspiring poets, it seems, are undeterred by such temporal anomalies. You are, however, cordially invited to "take a flying leap" during these additional 24 hours.

Please proceed with caution. Artistic aspirations are a delicate dance, and the path to publication is littered with the fallen hopes of countless dreamers. But hey, maybe your sandwich is killer. Just remember, Kewpie or bust.

Fowl Feathered Review | Poets & Writers (pw.org)

“Non ignora mali, miseris succurrere disco.”

— Virgil, The Aeneid



The City of Shifting Sands

By Rostam Tabari

Scroll 1: The Fractured Mirror

Greeting of Human Inquiry

Behold the boundless mind of man, and its ceaseless pursuit of understanding. May the following words serve as a testament to the unending search for knowledge and the relentless, often beautiful, complexity of our world.

Part I: Repo Man Is Coming for your Dreams

My mind is a fractured mirror—a disjointed simulacrum of Boise's splintered pavement, a low-rent crucible where the echoes of renown and insignificance cavort in delirious ballet. From this delirious forge, emissaries are dispatched clad in the skins of fallen demigods and those yet to rise, bearing telegrams of song into auditoriums that are at once sanctuaries and trapdoors.

Among these spectral heralds, the key impersonator, Summer, strides forth—a singular presence carved out of an indifferent expanse. Her very essence has been meticulously molded by none other than Damian Winter, an agent whose face is itself a masquerade of concealment, his plastic veneer concealing the raw, unspoken truths of a legacy not

easily borne. Under Damian Winter's exacting watch, Ms. Summer navigates fame's labyrinthine corridors with a furtive grace, an Ariadne amidst the urban chaos.

In this sprawling carnival of fractured thought, the agent's clientele are not mere dilettantes but scholars, seekers of the raw equation, the uncompromising data—a hunger for that primal truth lurking behind the polished veneer of established knowledge. As if excavating the depths of collective memory, archaeologists in the Penobscot scrape at the ancient strata, unearthing relics whispered to be ten millennia in age—a testament to time's relentless demolition and ornate rebirth.

Amid these cerebral excavations, Damian Winter's bitter chuckle drifts like dead leaves: "Guess they're really into older women," a wry observation promptly countered in the dim recesses by a murmuring, "Proctologists aren't the only ones snorting crack." Such ephemeral epigrams dissolve into the urban chill—a shard of irony, a mirror held up to the city's cavernous, often hollow, core.

Then comes the inventory—a motley collection of repossessed dreams: a saltwater treadmill devised for horses—a monument to submerged, Sisyphean exertion; an artificial spawn-maker for fish—a sterile pipe dream of genetic mastery; and a 1927 fairground organ whose once jubilant notes now lie stilled beneath layers of dust and neglect. Each artifact bears silent witness to human ambition, now reclaimed by the inexorable hand of debt and progress.

In a cavernous hall—a cathedral of modern thought—a man pontificates on the center of mass, a universe where equations whirl in the void, scale systems stretch like cosmic nets, and relation invariance strains to forge meaning out of chaos incarnate. His incantatory words construct a cosmos in the language of motion, where "D" and "E" are not mere symbols but the very fabric of existence, and the unfolding "action field" becomes an algebraic ballet, equations bleeding together in a perennial dance with the ungraspable truths of being.

Behind him, a woman cloaked in the gravitas of ancient jurisprudence stands as a quiet oracle, clutching a fragment torn from the storied Cairo Genizah. Her voice—a murmur forged through the passage of relentless centuries—traverses the battle-scarred terrain of faded papyri and shattered ink. She dispenses riddles of legal canons and paradoxes, invoking "the animal" and "the pure king" as words that drift in the liminal space between law and ethics, truth and distortion, casting the ancient text as an arena for dueling phantoms.

A physicist then steps forth—an audacious architect unraveling time—asserting that time is not the axis upon which change pivots but a gossamer veil that conceals a plurality of simultaneous states.

"Without time," he proclaims with conspiratorial fervor, "entities exist in all their infinite selves at once."

In his wild vision, velocity transmutes from a humble measure to a cunning snare, and the quantum realm unfolds as an intricate web of potentiality, collapsing only in the transitory flicker of observation—a brief, exquisite gesture to order pandemonium.

He waxes on about subjective observers, the notorious measurement problem, and an informational cosmos—a realm composed not of tangible objects but of shifting data, puzzles assembled by the trembling hands of consciousness. The collapse of quantum states morphs into a desperate act, a compression of the infinite into finite compartments, each ordered fragment a reluctant concession to perception.

"Quantum entanglement," he confides, "is the universe's secret knot—a delicate, interdependent bond defying the constraints of space and time."

Thus, the past is an impenetrable vault, the future a mere shadow of unmeasured hope, while the present is a fleeting crucible where disparate worlds converge.

A woman, garbed in austere modesty like a discreet chronicler of history, then steps forward. In measured cadence, she reveals that history is nothing less than a rhetoric of

the unsaid—a labyrinth of silences and implications, a tapestry woven from the unspoken. With quiet authority, she reminds us that even the most venerated chronicler, in his subtle rebellion against the clamor of dogma, left behind a mosaic of speeches—a myriad mirror reflecting multiple, conflicting truths.

From distant, timeworn deserts comes another voice—an echo asserting that literature from ancient eastern sands is no mere shadow trailing behind a luminous dawn but a synchronous pulse, a universal cadence attuned with modernity. This voice expounds on indigenous genres and modernity's kaleidoscopic facets, on the motif of death through voracious consumption—a lament that unites despair and hope across disparate cultures. To her, the myth of a "belated" narrative is merely a Western cage, a construct that confines rather than liberates understanding.

Finally, a linguist emerges, cloaked in refined austerity. With the precision of one who dissects reality through shifting indexicals, she unveils the present tense as a mutable mirror—a reflective surface capturing not the moment itself but the intricate relations binding "John said" to "Mary likes." In the peculiar cadence of her native tongue, she discerns a subtle non-commitment—a hesitation that epitomizes the uncertainty of perception itself.

Thus, in this vast, ever-morphing carnival of fractured truths, the masqueraders transcend mere facades and become genuine fissures through which raw, unvarnished realities surge. Like urbane flâneurs traversing chaotic streets, they chronicle the city's pulse—a carnival defined not by its geography but by a state of being, a cosmic contemplation amid the ruins of certainty. And all the while, resonating with an existential heartbeat, one refrain endures:

The city breathes.

Part II: The Language of Being

A physicist then steps forth—an audacious architect unraveling time—asserting that time is not the axis upon which change pivots but a gossamer veil that conceals a plurality of simultaneous states. "Without time," he proclaims with conspiratorial fervor, "entities

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Colophon

This text, entitled "The Fractured Mirror," was concluded on the twenty-sixth of August in the year two thousand twenty-five. The contents herein represent a meditation on the fragmented nature of modern thought, as observed and transcribed by an anonymous chronicler. It is a record of ideas and a reflection on the human condition, intended for intellectual inquiry, not spiritual doctrine. May it be read with a critical mind and a curious heart.

Scroll 11: Enter the Steve

Greeting of Inquiry

The mind, like a polished stone, reveals its truths not through the sun's harsh gaze, but through the patient friction of doubt. May this next scroll continue our shared journey into the labyrinth of meaning and non-meaning.

The honey-thief, not the hive-raider, bleeds the slow ache. She walks not forward, but a receding tide, a ghost-limb memory of intention. Sir Vival, a chrome ulcer blooming on the asphalt, coughed awake. 1958's apology for Detroit's planned decay, a bifurcated beast shuddering with the weight of un-roads. Not a car, but a theorem proven wrong, its twin rear axle a stuttering Morse code of obsolescence. The driver's glass eye, a cyclopean bubble, offered only the illusion of command over a crumbling geometry. Seatbelts and roll cages – pathetic bandages on a psychic wound.

The Agape brothers – Sky, River, Isthmus – not of flesh, but of cracked vinyl and the static hum of forgotten frequencies. They wore the ghost-skin of 1990s cargo, faded polos salvaged from Indiana's forgotten auctions. A deliberate unraveling, a surrender to the flotsam of time. Their mission: a top-down delirium, a Platonic-fascist blueprint for optimized progeny. A rusted accusation leveled at the universe's cruel joke.

In the back, a phantom ring pressed against greasy wrestling magazines and the brine-soaked ghosts of artisanal pickles. Not canvas and rope, but the idea of it, a resonant frequency of controlled violence. Isthmus, seeing suplexes in every shadow, felt the phantom roar of a crowd, a low-frequency throb in his teeth. He'd learned the language of the body not from screens, but from truck stop whispers, the mythic grit of diner lore. The collar-and-elbow, the piledriver – a primal dialect of dominance, a silent scream.

They were its unwitting hieroglyphs, their journey a protracted, silent grapple with the void.

She walks not forward, but backwards, the leash a taut umbilical cord to a disappearing present.

Steve Subconscious, the shaman of the squared circle, materialized not in a place, but in the gravitational well of a flickering streetlamp. A human palimpsest, his skin a cartography of forgotten feuds and celebrated slams. Winged skulls, snarling tigers – a bestiary of the unconscious etched in fading ink. He didn't speak, but resonated, the air around him crackling with the ghost static of a thousand roars. He was a walking relic, a refusal to be buried. He once faced "The Existentialist," a wrestler who lectured on meaninglessness instead of pinning. Steve simply stared, and the crowd – a thousand-eyed god – understood: the struggle was the meaning. A machinic singularity, a functional connectivity humming with forgotten power.

He held the two-dollar sweet potato elixir, a viscous, ochre sacrament, and poured it onto the asphalt. A single drop, a dark bloom on the grey. No need for words. The brothers, minds fractured by miles and diesel fumes, felt the sacrifice seep into their bones. The waste was an offering, a libation to the indifferent expanse. They sought a sign, and Steve delivered: the universe wasn't a text to be deciphered, but a stain to be felt, a mark demanding intuitive understanding. Their illusion was to change the past, when their intervention was always already comprised, the truth born of misrecognition. Their journey, their Appointment in Samarra, the attempt to avoid destiny being its realization.

The conversation unfolded not through mouths, but through the subconscious. Metallic rain, humming streetlamps, cracked pavement – a dialogue of absence. They weren't telling stories, but forging a new lexicon, a new way of seeing. The "videre-lamp" wasn't illumination, but a flickering consciousness, a silent witness to decay. "Mental tangles" weren't metaphor, but a literal mapping of a new cosmology. "Mirror ghosts" weren't apparitions, but the recognition of the self as a fractured kaleidoscope, a primal truth glimpsed in the dark.

Their journey, a linguistic vivisection, splitting words to unearth prehistoric bones. Linguistic scavengers, discovering the debris of reality was the blueprint of the cosmos. The city, a suffocating carnival of senses, every sound a new color, every smell a new texture. Assaulted by the world, the polished veneer of language ripped away, they embraced the decay. The city whispered: “You are not separate from the decay; you are the decay.” A threat, an invitation to a deeper being. The grotesque sublime, a flash of insight born from the beautiful and the profane.

She walks not forward, but backwards, clutching the leash, dissolving into the static.

In Good Grief, Idaho, a man on a metal catwalk bowed his head, the fluorescent hum a low thrum against the distant train. Above, a woman with shears clipped his hair, tiny snips a counter-rhythm to the Ranchero music bleeding from a rotting Triumph convertible. The man inside, obscured by mirrored Ray-Bans, sat perfectly still.

The man on the catwalk held a soup can to his ear, a wax string descending to the street. He murmured into it.

Catwalk man to Triumph man: “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

Silence. The metallic clatter of cans, the taut string. Triumph man’s voice, pulled taut by the wax: “In a long journey, the first step is the greatest.”

The woman paused, shears suspended. Catwalk man, a ghost of a laugh in his voice: “The small axe can fell the big tree.”

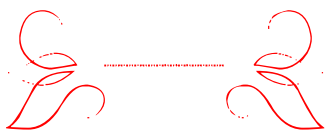
Triumph man leaned forward, the music swelling, the bass a faint pulse. The metallic taste of rain.

Triumph man: “However long the night, the dawn will break.”

In the end, the brothers, the rusting car, the wrestler-koan. The question echoing: Is the universe listening, or merely echoing its own silence? A woman, walking backwards, leash slack, dissolved into the shadows. The honey-thief, finally, at peace with the sting.

Colophon

This scroll, "Part Two of the Fractured Mirror," concludes this record of urban entropy and intellectual discord. The chronicler has transcribed these observations not as fact, but as a mosaic of fleeting truths, a final gesture in the face of an indifferent cosmos. Here, the words end; the search continues.



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Natasha Winenard

1. B&W

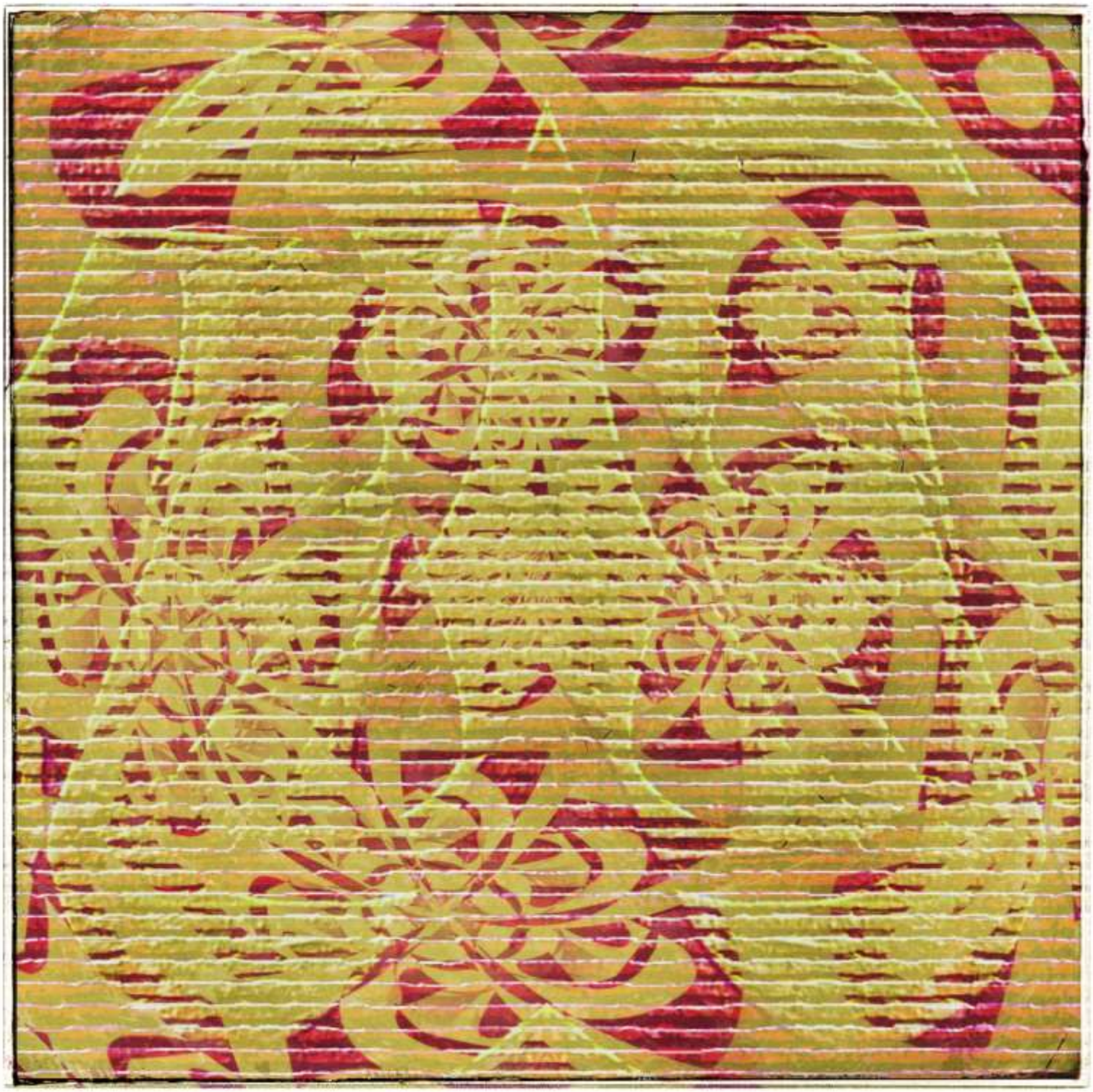
The first image, a monochrome dream, where figures are not quite figures,
but the ghost of a crowd, a memory of a street corner in Prague
after the last tram has rattled past.
Lacan's mirror stage, fragmented,
a shattered reflection of the self not yet formed,
or perhaps, already dissolved.
Dashed lines, a cartography of yearning,
tracing paths not taken, connections severed.
The gaze, that elusive objet petit a,
is trapped within the chiaroscuro,
searching for a face in the static,
a voice in the silence of shattered light.
This is the Real of the unconscious, stark, unyielding,
a primal scream echoing in the void.

11. White Shards

Then the second image unfolds,
a sudden eruption of white, like torn paper,
like sails unfurling in a tempest of meaning.
The black, though still present, is background now,
the Symbolic order asserting its dominance,
imposing structure, even in its deconstruction.
The dashed lines, once white and guiding,
are now black, broken, pointing inward,
suggesting a labyrinth of language,
the endless deferral of the signifier.
Fragments of what was, are now reorganized,
a new narrative attempting to coalesce,
yet always slipping, always almost there,
like a forgotten name on the tip of the tongue.
This is the imaginary, grasping at fragments,
trying to make sense of the nonsensical.

III. Carnival

And finally, the third image,
a riot of color, a scream of the senses,
the "gonzo" explosion of the Real,
filtered through the distorted lens of the Imaginary.
Red like urgency, green like envy, blue like the forgotten sea,
all clashing, merging, pulling apart.
The dashed lines, sometimes black, sometimes invisible,
are no longer paths but scars,
the incisions of meaning on a canvas of chaos.
Here, the subject is truly lost,
immersed in the jouissance of pure sensation,
a carnival of the unconscious where all boundaries blur.
The Czech Informel spirit, a raw, untamed expression,
meets the hyperbolic excess of a mind
unleashed from the constraints of logic.
This is where the symptom dances, vibrant and demanding,
a beautiful, terrifying truth in the heart of the absurd.



Weaving the Unseen Hand

By Jay Wallace Undertow

A grid of whispers stretches taut across the mind, threads spun from the quiet noise of existence—almost human, yet not quite. Lines bend and ripple like breath held too long, suspended in a moment that refuses to pass. A spine of fractured light, fractured like a memory slipping through the cracks of consciousness, unravels slowly, inexorably, revealing the faint echo of a name that flickers just beyond reach.

The weft is a wound—deep and silent—stitched into the fabric of perception; the warp, a question—persistent, unyielding. How many times must the needle pass before the cloth forgets its own origin? Before it ceases to remember the act of making? The fabric is a landscape of resistance—faint, trembling—and the questions linger like shadows: Was it the cloth that refused? Or was it the weaver, hesitant, or perhaps compelled?

Here, the body dissolves into rumor—a whisper of pink bleeding through the warp, a blush of fading flesh. Fingers stretch into static, into the hum of an ancient loom's hymn, a song that whispers of time lost, of stories stitched in secret.

You trace the ridges of your own face, counting hollows where the thread resists, where hesitation lingers—an echo of doubt—and wonder if it is your hand or the fabric that resists, that refuses to yield fully. Memory flickers like a dying filament—glitch, or grace?—a fragment of the pattern that might never be completed, lost in the labyrinth of your own unraveling.

It was winter, the winter of '92, down in Dover-Foxcroft, Maine. A winter so thick with silence that it devoured sound itself, leaving only the shivering resonance of emptiness. The town hall clocktower counted out the hours—each chime brittle, echoing against the ice like a cracked mirror reflecting fragments of time long frozen.

At the gas station—"The Labyrinth"—a place of winding aisles and hidden corners, where one could buy cigarettes and lose hours in the dark, a space that seemed to swallow the very idea of certainty. I was there, on the night shift, with S., a man whose face bore the crumpled map of roads traveled and not traveled, whose eyes—milky agates—held the weight of unspoken stories.

S. was an unwitting participant in a study—"Long-Term Behavioral Nudging in Non-Consensual Public Spaces"—a phrase that sounded like a secret code, a whisper behind closed doors, a question of ethics and control. He knew nothing of it, yet he lived within it. His reality was a series of mundane events—the whine of the credit card machine, the sigh of the air compressor, the flickering decay of fluorescent bulbs—each a small death of meaning.

Night after night, he watched the grainy security footage—an unsteady landscape of flickering shadows and static—searching for patterns, for signs. A woman in red appears—her figure ghosting through the aisles, walking through stacks of motor oil as if they weren't there—an anomaly, a glitch in a carefully constructed matrix. He watched her, hoping for repetition, a sign that the digital gods might reveal the secret he longs to decipher. The pattern becomes a prayer, a silent incantation stitched into the fabric of his solitude.

The camera's eye—what Lacan might call the "gaze"—is an unmoving witness, impartial and relentless, observing the slow disintegration of his identity, the erosion of self. S. is no longer merely a man; he is a flicker—just a data point in a vast, indifferent network, a whisper caught in the static hum of the old loom's song.

And then, the music shifts—no longer the gentle, cyclical notes of Philip Glass's Glassworks, but Stravinsky's fierce, chaotic rhythms—an awakening or perhaps a descent into chaos. The change is subtle but undeniable, like a butterfly's wing fluttering against the fabric of a dream.

One night, a visitor arrives—her truck, battered and tired, pulls into the lot. She has a face like a broken fender, a voice gravelly and worn. She asks him, her words a rough echo: “Do you ever feel like you’re just a rumor?” S. stares, silent, his eyes reflecting the harsh headlights, a mirror of the question itself. A flicker of recognition—perhaps of himself, or of the fabric that binds him—passes through his gaze.

He traces the contours of his face, counting the hollows and ridges where resistance resides—where the thread resists, where hesitation lingers. Or perhaps it is the cloth that refuses to yield, the fabric that has forgotten its origin, its creator.

She leaves in her truck, leaving behind a trail of exhaust and questions. The night deepens, thickening into a silence so dense it presses against his chest. The music changes again—this time, a wild, restless rhythm—an echo of chaos. S. feels the needle’s passage, the fabric’s forgetting—long, slow, inevitable.

He no longer knows if he is a subject or a rumor, a whisper caught within the static of a loom’s old hymn. The fabric has unraveled, and what remains is a ghost—an echo of a body, a blush of pink bleeding into the darkness. The unseen hand has woven him into a tapestry of doubt, a question unanswered, a pattern forever incomplete.

TOASTED WESTERN

By Pesky the Horsefly

A boy with a battered guitar drifts west.
Carolina pines hiss like slow steam behind him.
He trades sheet-rock rooms for highways without borders.
Strings rattle—raw—his voice cracks but keeps burning.
Father's hush trails him, a mute hound thick with dust.
County-fair lights crown him king for a single night.
Lib's storm-dark eyes read futures inside that uproar:
thirty-five and seventeen—love un-named, un-signed.
In the motel neon they fold a vow like paper,
slip it under ribs where no spotlight can reach.

Tabloid venom drips—each headline a small incision—
twelve hidden years bruise quiet beneath their rings.
Waterfall chapel—clandestine, cold, and glimmering—
echoes the promise they soldered in secret springs.
Lib, architect of hush, braces the rumor's rafters;
Hardy threads crowds, his chords bright with borrowed starlight.
Shadows tighten—loyalty pulls like undertow;
silence, both refuge and cage, thickens the night air.

A youthful voice of glass—recordings crack, then bleed—
her wary glance detects the wire beneath his creed.
The throne of crowd applause corrodes in silver rust;

their marriage, masked in gold, now fractures into dust.
Lit screens repeat the fall—crown slipping, orbit lost—
a gale of ruined notes counts every private cost.
Cold lawyers circle close—bright art becomes a debt—
fame's spotlight dims to grey; his legend stumbles, set.

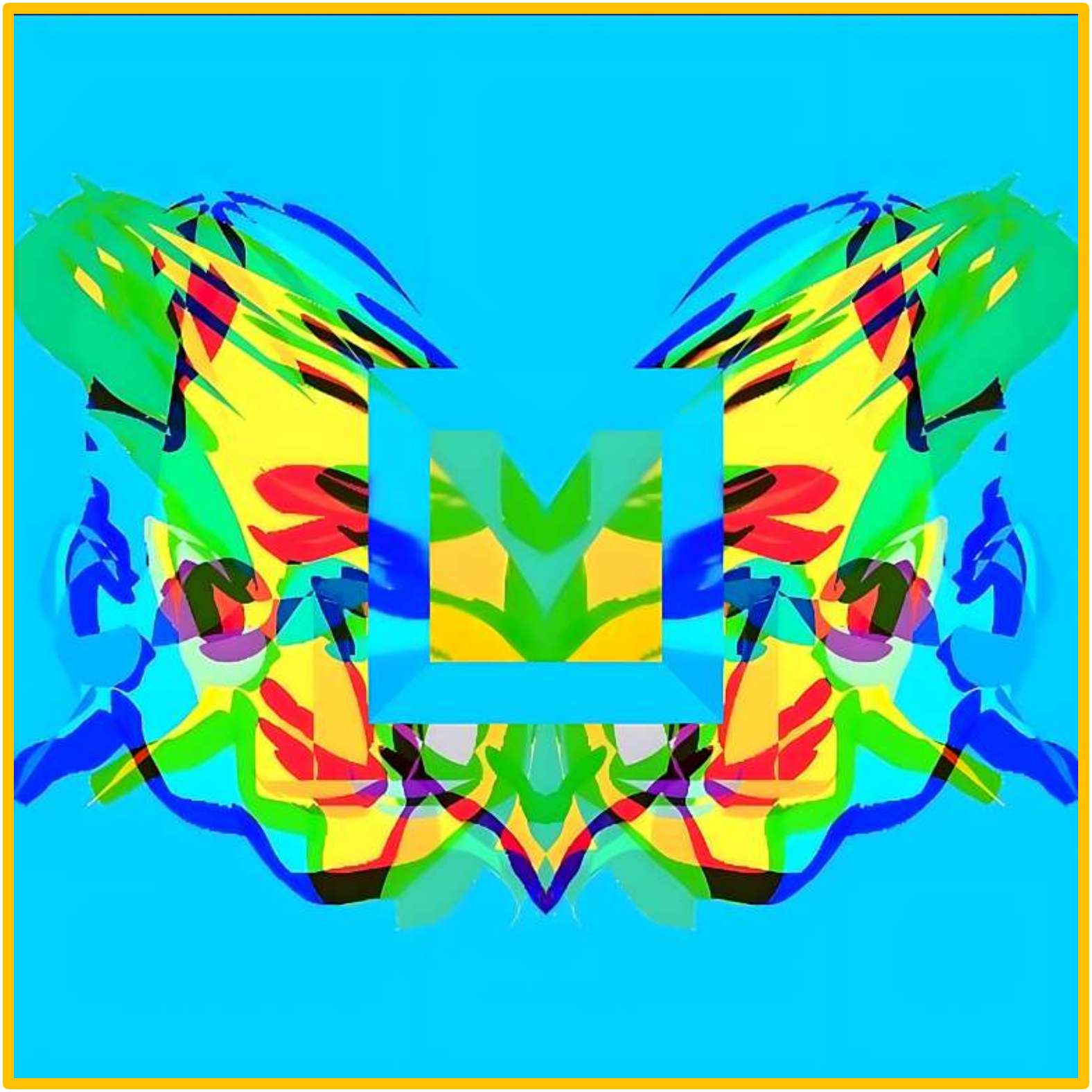
Periscope—silence. | Périscope—silence.
Sonar, depth charge—| charge de profondeur—
plave v temnotě. | (all swims in dark).
"The Race Is On"—| La course s'élance—
stars spin, glide. | vse klouže dál.
Torpedo—dive. | Torpille—plonge—
Everything moves. | Všechno se hýbe.

Sterile fluorescence flays the corridors of breath—
viral thieves invade his throat, unpick the mesh of speech.
A labyrinth of mind slips tiles beneath his feet;
names fall, flash, and fade—thin lanterns drowned by sleet.
Yet—in that chalk-white hush—her hand refuses night;
she stitches melody where aphasia claws the light.
Hope, a brittle ember, flickers—but will not die—
two heartbeats drum in code no silence can belie.

The boy, the legend, the ghost—three shadows entwine.
Pines remember the first chord; wards recall the last.
His voice—softer now—hovers above the footlights,
a moth of sound that won't abandon the dark.

Lib walks beside it, keeper of what survived.
Fame rusts. Crowds thin. But somewhere, strings still tremble,
and in the hush their echoes learn to sing.

Pesky's Ten Cents:
I've seen it all—from the first chord in the pines to the final hush. I've flitted through fame's glare, whispered in secrets, and watched shadows tighten. I carry the stories in my tiny wings—inevitable, relentless, enduring.



Evidence of Things Not Seen

By Leonard A. Schaefer

Imagine the opening of Max Richter's "On the Nature of Daylight"—its gentle, evocative strings rising like a whisper of the unseen–setting the stage for a tale that dances delicately between the tangible and the intangible, the seen and the unseen.

In a quiet Connecticut duplex, where the aroma of aged books mingled with freshly brewed coffee, lived **Jason** and his father, **Patrick**–a duo whose lives were a subtle symphony of routines, reflections, and unspoken metaphors. Their home, a relic with a porch swing that groaned in time with the wind, served as both sanctuary and stage for their daily performance, each movement a note in an ongoing, invisible score.
The music swells softly–strings ascending into a contemplative motif–mirroring the layered depths of their existence.

Between these two souls was a feline enigma, **Doppelgänger**, whose name epitomized the duality of their inner worlds. Doppelgänger shared both sides of the duplex via a secret cat door–a threshold embodying the border between their minds and selves. One door led into Jason's youthful curiosity, the other into Patrick's contemplative reverie; the cat, a silent conductor of duality, slipped through unnoticed, unbound by the boundaries of perception.

Playful pizzicatos punctuate the scene–like the stealthy steps of a prowling cat–light and mischievous.

Each morning, as the mail truck hummed into view, Jason and Patrick would perform their synchronized ritual: hands reaching simultaneously for their mailboxes, an act of puppet-like precision masking a deeper, more intricate choreography of the psyche. Doppelgänger, ever watchful, observed from his hidden perch—an unseen member of the orchestra, his silent presence a testament to the duality that underpinned their lives. The strings deepen—an undercurrent of mystery—signaling the unseen forces at work.

On this particular day, the weather house—a tiny Alpine chalet perched on a bookshelf—stirred with life. Its anthropomorphic figures, a maiden and a gentleman, pirouetted and danced at the faintest provocation, affirming the surreal harmony of their universe. Today, as the mailboxes clicked shut in unison, the maiden spun, her presence heralded by the distant chime of cowbells—an impossible Alpine echo—resounding through the mundane.

This sound design—a non-diegetic layer—became a playful, fantastical commentary on their reality, transcending sensory logic. The cowbells replaced the familiar sounds of suburban life, emphasizing that their universe was a tapestry woven from absurdity, intellect, and profound human connection.

The music hints at a deeper, more layered motif—like the unseen orchestra tuning before the performance.

Their conversations—sharp, erudite, and brimming with esoteric references—became a kind of fencing. Jason, immersed in digital musings, pondered the nature of existence through a talking roadside attraction—an **active, speaking entity**—while Patrick, scribbling furiously, approached similar conclusions regarding a sentient street corner.

It was as if an unseen conductor guided their thoughts—a **Diatessaron of Dimensions**—where multiple realities intersected, echoing each other in a grand, invisible symphony. Cue a shimmering motif—an aura of mystery and wit—highlighting the unseen conductor behind it all.

Meanwhile, Doppelgänger prowled through the duplex, slipping through the secret cat door—an invisible baton passing between the conscious and unconscious selves. One moment, curled on Patrick's armchair, serene; the next, sneaking into Jason's room, eyes gleaming with mischief. The cat door was not merely a passage but a symbol—a liminal space where the subconscious and conscious selves mingled, unseen but felt.

In the midst of this metaphysical dance, Patrick attempted to livestream a university lecture on his phone. His gnarled fingers fumbled—an inevitable act of aging—only to accidentally activate the emergency call feature.

"9-1-1, what is your emergency?" crackled the dispatcher.
Patrick, ever composed, replied with a mischievous smile: "No emergency, young lady. I was merely attempting to access the latest lecture on post-structuralist semiotics.

Though, if one considers the deconstruction of meaning, perhaps an emergency is always lurking—like the sun behind the clouds, or the mailman behind the hedge."
At that moment, on her screen, a phosphorescent screwworm larva writhed—a grotesque, digital parasite—mirroring Patrick's inadvertent invocation of chaos. The odor of library paste and overripe philosophy wafted from her monitor—a Nabokovian detail, satirical and sharp.

Jason, hearing his father's academic tone, tiptoed outside. He found Patrick engaged in a surreal, yet polite, conversation with Officer Miller, who stood bewildered on the porch.

"Mr. O'Malley," the officer began, eyebrows raised, "we received a 911 call. Is everything alright?"

Patrick, gesturing grandly, encompassed the street. "Perfectly, officer. I was merely engaging in a philosophical colloquy—an unseen conversation—about the fallacies of linear causality in the digital age."
Cue a playful, ironic motif—music that winks at the absurd.

Meanwhile, the police cruiser's radio emitted static—then, unexpectedly, the voice of Lon Chaney, whispering cryptic advice on flesh-eating parasites—an active memory asserting itself from celluloid's past. The officer, unimpressed, tapped the radio, convinced it was a loose wire. Yet the voice persisted—an echo of history, asserting its narrative.

Jason's gaze shifted to the street corner. It rippled—animated and alive—like a living diorama. The old oak tree, a silent witness to generations, leaned in, leaves whispering leafy commentary. A faded photograph of a stern ancestor murmured corrections to Patrick's musings—its voice dry, papery, like a library's forgotten tome turning a page.
The music swells again—this time, with a humor and wit that underscores the unseen connections.

Throughout, Doppelgänger, embodying the duality at the core of their minds, prowled—the literal and metaphorical bridge between the seen and unseen, the conscious and subconscious. When the chaos subsided, he'd curl on Jason's lap or slip back into Patrick's arms, a silent testament to their ongoing internal symphony.

Neither Jason nor Patrick displayed panic. Their faces, serene yet knowing, acknowledged the truth: they inhabited a universe where the invisible orchestra played on—an eternal symphony of the unseen. The weather house remained neutral, figures neither advancing nor retreating, a symbol of transcended duality. The cowbells chimed anew—a wild, celebratory peal—announcing the absurd procession, the evidence of things not seen.
The final notes of the strings fade into a contemplative silence—an invitation to listen for what cannot be heard.

As the surreal tableau dissolves into static, Jason offers a knowing smile—an erudite grin that recognizes life's greatest secret: that the most profound truths are often those of evidence unseen, heard only in the silent music of the universe.
Fade out with a solitary violin echoing into the night—a reminder that the unseen orchestra's music is eternal.

C. R BUMPUS,
DEALER IN
FRUIT
AND
Confectionery,
172 LISBON ST.,
Lewiston,
MAINE.

full of ink in
Descriptive
AND
iptive

Crust

By Tiger Phillips

I wove my life's story into a complex tapestry while living in Petaluma Petaluma,

Petaluma, California

People came to see it

Somebody bought it

My baby

My life

Hanging in a doctor's office

People talk about their butts beneath it

Life as tapestry as two-ply Oracle

Maybe I should just make bread

Instead

The Fracture-Line of Duluth:
A Phenomenological Investigation into the Semiotics of Dissolution

By Horace F. Mandrake

I. Prolegomena to a Theory of Luminous Infection

The particular quality of light that afflicts Duluth on certain days—a phenomenon I shall designate as lux morbus, borrowing from the medieval physicians who understood disease as an imbalance of humors—deserves more than cursory meteorological notation. This jaundiced illumination, seeping through what can only be described as the city's perpetual cloud-skin (a dermis of vapor that recalls nothing so much as Charcot's photographs of hysterical contractures[1]), does not merely fall upon surfaces in the manner prescribed by Newtonian optics. Rather, it infects—a verb I choose with deliberate precision, mindful of Canguilhem's observation that "the pathological is not the absence of a norm but the presence of another norm."[2]

Consider, if you will, the atmospheric conditions as a kind of sociological petri dish—though here I must pause to acknowledge the curious citation that haunts this narrative: Perelson, J. et al., 1928, The Journal of Unseen Persuasions. A thorough search of the Index Medicus, the Psychological Abstracts, and even the more esoteric corners of the Warburg Institute's library reveals no such publication. One suspects this journal exists only in what we might term, following Binswanger's phenomenological psychiatry, the

Eigenwelt of failed academics[3]—that peculiar inner world where phantom citations multiply like bacteria in agar, each more authoritative than the last.

But I digress—or rather, I progress, for as Kierkegaard noted, life must be lived forward but can only be understood backward[4], and so too must this narrative spiral outward from its center like a gastropod's shell, accumulating meaning through accretion rather than linear development.

II. The Metamorphosis of the Quotidian Observer

Our protagonist—though can we truly employ such a narratologically loaded term in what aspires to be a nouveau roman sensibility?—sits at her scarred dinette table, a piece of furniture that bears the stigmata of countless meals, each scratch and burn mark a palimpsest of domestic archaeology. She is engaged in what can only be described as an excavation of meaning from a plate of colorless sustenance. Note the distinction: not food—sustenance. This taxonomical precision matters enormously when one is parsing what Lévi-Strauss would call the "grammar of survival"[5]—those deep structures that govern the transformation of raw matter into cultural meaning.

The woman herself has undergone a curious metamorphosis. No longer merely a Girl Friday—that antiquated term redolent of secretarial pools and carbon paper, itself derived from Defoe's Crusoe[6]—the city has transformed her into something altogether more complex: a witness-thing, a human videre-lamp. Here I employ a neologism constructed from the Latin videre (to see) and the common lamp, creating a compound that suggests not merely illumination but active perception. She flickers in the gathering dusk of what Mandel has termed "late capitalism"[7]—though whether we are truly in

capitalism's senescence or merely experiencing another of its periodic crises remains a matter of considerable debate among the post-Marxist theoreticians.

III. The Musicology of Metastasis

The auditory dimension of our scene demands particular attention. The air—and here we must imagine air not as mere atmosphere but as a kind of cultural medium, a bearer of signs in the Peircean sense[8]—doesn't carry music in any conventional understanding of acoustic transmission. Rather, it secretes it, as a gland might secrete hormones, suggesting a biological model of musical propagation that would have fascinated the speculative biologists of the Romantic era.

The specific composition in question, Philip Glass's Glassworks (1982), represents a peculiar choice, for Glass's minimalism—with its repetitive structures and gradual harmonic shifts—functions less as traditional music than as a kind of temporal architecture. Each phrase doesn't merely repeat; it metastasizes, a medical metaphor I employ advisedly, recalling Susan Sontag's meditation on illness as metaphor[9]. The cellular division of musical phrases in the temporal lobe (that region of the brain responsible for, among other things, the processing of auditory information and the formation of memories) creates what we might term a "desire-mare"—a portmanteau that fuses longing with terror, creating a linguistic chimera that gallops through the synapses.

This brings us to a crucial philosophical juncture, for when one realizes that hell is not, as Sartre proposed, other people[10], but rather the same people, encountered in endless

repetition, one has stumbled upon a truth so fundamental that it threatens the very foundations of social existence.

IV. The Hydrology of Despair

The city breathes.

This refrain—for so we must call it, acknowledging its structural function as both punctuation and respiration—introduces a anthropomorphic dimension to our urban landscape. But let us turn our attention to the window, that membrane between interior and exterior space, where condensation performs its slow ballet.

What traces itself upon the glass is not merely moisture but a form of liquid calligraphy, each droplet inscribing what Derrida might have called a "trace"[11]—that mark of absence that paradoxically affirms presence. The condensation doesn't form a map in any cartographic sense; rather, it composes a prophecy, though prophecy here must be understood not in its vulgar sense of future-telling but in its older meaning of speaking forth a hidden truth.

Each droplet represents what we might term a failed escape attempt—water molecules that have achieved sufficient energy to become vapor, only to be condemned to return to their liquid state upon contact with the cold glass. Is this not a perfect metaphor for the human condition under modernity? Each rivulet becomes a biography, water remembering its oceanic origins in what Bachelard would have recognized as a form of material imagination[12].

V. The Betrayal of the Ceramic Familiar

The coffee cup—that most quotidian of objects, what Heidegger might have called "ready-to-hand" (Zuhandenheit)[13]—has undergone a curious transformation. Its handle, once ergonomically faithful (and here we might pause to consider the etymology of "ergonomic," from the Greek ergon (work) and nomos (law), suggesting a lawful relationship between human body and designed object), now feels alien, as if it were, to employ a particularly grotesque image, a severed finger grafted to porcelain.

This sensation of uncanny alienation from the familiar brings us inevitably to Lacan, that "charlatan-prophet of the psyche" (though one notes the narrator's ambivalence in this epithet, simultaneously dismissive and reverent). The Lacanian notion of the Symbolic Order—that linguistic and cultural matrix within which human subjectivity is constituted[14]—hasn't merely cracked in our protagonist's experience; it has begun to suppurate, a medical term denoting the formation and discharge of pus, suggesting that the wound in the symbolic fabric has become infected.

VI. The Ferrous Backbone of American Disappointment

The city breathes.

Duluth's essential structure, we are told, is not geological but ferrous—those railroad tracks that slice through the pine forests "like a sutured scar." This simile deserves unpacking, for it suggests simultaneously wound and healing, violence and repair. The

railroad, that great symbol of American manifest destiny and industrial progress, here becomes a sign of something altogether more ambiguous.

The tracks don't simply vanish into distance according to the laws of perspective; they dissolve into possibility, each tie functioning as a vertebra in what our narrator terms "the spine of American disappointment." This anatomical metaphor transforms the landscape into a body—specifically, a body with a compromised skeletal system, unable to support the weight of its own aspirations.

The memory that surfaces here—or perhaps, as our narrator suggests with characteristic phenomenological precision, it is memory that remembers her—concerns a draftsman's manual discovered in "Kowalski's Junk Emporium." The specificity of the name suggests a real place, though whether it exists in Duluth's commercial geography or only in the narrator's psychogeography remains uncertain. The manual's pages, "brittle as autumn wasps," carry the olfactory traces of "Lucky Strikes and lost ambition"—a conjunction that links a specific brand of cigarette (introduced by the American Tobacco Company in 1871)[15] with a more abstract concept of thwarted possibility.

VII. The Homunculus as Epistemological Tyrant

The draftsman's manual introduces a crucial concept: the eye as homunculus. This notion requires careful explication, for it draws upon multiple intellectual traditions. The homunculus, in medieval alchemy, was a miniature human believed to be created through artificial means—Paracelsus provided a recipe involving human sperm and horse dung[16].

In modern neuroscience, the cortical homunculus maps the proportional representation of different body parts in the sensory and motor cortices[17].

But our text proposes something more sinister: the eye as "a tiny dictator surveying its domain of lines and angles, imposing order where none exists." This transforms vision from passive reception to active construction, echoing Kant's notion of the synthetic a priori[18] while simultaneously critiquing it. Perspective becomes "a kind of origami"—the Japanese art of paper folding serving as metaphor for the ways in which reality can be "folded and refolded until truth becomes unrecognizable."

VIII. The Semiotics of Synthetic Hair

The entrance of the "broken men" into the diner introduces a new semiotic system: that of artificial hair as existential statement. These toupees, worn "like battle standards," function not as simple disguises but as what our narrator terms manifestos—public declarations of philosophical position. Each synthetic strand becomes "a declaration of war against entropy," invoking the second law of thermodynamics as metaphor for human dissolution.

The specific case of Mr. Swinburne (the name perhaps evoking the Victorian poet known for his decadent verses)[19] provides a particularly poignant example. His use of "hardware-store adhesive—the kind meant for bathroom tiles, not human dignity" represents a category error of tragic proportions. When he laughed, his face would schism—a term borrowed from geology and theology, suggesting both physical splitting and doctrinal division—revealing "the pale, larval truth beneath."

This image of the self as "failed architecture" recalls the architectural theory of Bernard Tschumi, who argued that architecture is not merely about space but about the events that occur within it[20]. The self, similarly, is not a stable structure but a continuous event, "always one tremor away from collapse."

IX. The Phenomenology of the Liminal

The city breathes.

The self-to-other relationship—that fundamental problematic of phenomenology from Husserl through Levinas[21]—manifests here not as abstract philosophical concept but as lived experience. It is "the space between her palm and the coffee cup's betraying ceramic," a distance that can be measured in millimeters yet contains infinite philosophical depth.

The window emerges as the crucial liminal zone, "where inside and outside conduct their daily armistice talks." This metaphor of negotiation suggests that the boundary between self and world is not fixed but constantly renegotiated. The glass is not transparent but "translucent with possibility," clouded with the breath of all who have pressed their foreheads against it and whispered, "Not this. Anything but this"—a prayer that is simultaneously rejection and recognition.

X. The Acoustics of Revelation

The auditory phenomenon that our protagonist experiences—"not with her ears (those mere meat-flaps) but with her marrow"—represents a form of what we might call "osseous perception," hearing through the bones. The sound resembles vocal fry, that creaky voice quality produced by slow vibration of the vocal cords, recently the subject of sociolinguistic study as a marker of young women's speech[22].

But here it functions as something more: "the static between stations, the white noise that contains all possible messages and therefore none." This paradox—plenitude as emptiness—recalls the information theory of Claude Shannon, who demonstrated that maximum information content is indistinguishable from random noise[23].

XI. The Frequency of Being

The static line reveals itself finally not as boundary but as frequency, not as threshold but as wavelength. This shift from spatial to temporal metaphor is crucial, for it suggests that the divisions we perceive in reality are not fixed barriers but oscillating states. The static line "vibrates between being and unbeing," recalling Heidegger's fundamental distinction while simultaneously collapsing it[24].

The comparison extends from the immediate—"the coffee growing cold in her grip"—to the cosmic—"the heat death of the universe"—and from the mundane—"Mr. Swinburne's hardware-store adhesive"—to the subatomic—"the fundamental forces that bind quarks." This scalar collapse, where the microscopic and macroscopic become indistinguishable,

suggests a vision of reality as fundamentally fractal, exhibiting self-similarity across all scales of observation.

XII. Coda: The Paradox of Finding

As the bruise-light deepens (and here we might note that bruises darken as blood breaks down beneath the skin, a process of decomposition that serves as metaphor for the dying day), a sound emerges—train horn or ship's whistle, the ambiguity is significant—representing all possible lamentations converging in Duluth's acoustic space.

The city transforms into a mouth, our protagonist positioned "in its throat, waiting to be either spoken or swallowed." This image of potential utterance or consumption returns us to the fundamental question of agency: does the subject speak, or is the subject spoken?

The cup's handle, in a final transformation, "feels suddenly, impossibly, like home." This paradox—the unhomely become homely—represents not resolution but a new form of tension, a dwelling within contradiction.

The city exhales.

The marginal note—"The real terror isn't that we might lose ourselves. It's that we might find ourselves, and discover we were never missing at all"—provides not conclusion but opening, suggesting that the search for self may be predicated on a fundamental misunderstanding: that there was ever a self to lose.

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The Sartorial Cartographer

By S. Artorial

I. *THE LEATHERY SELF AND THE GOLDEN SMILE*

We sailed through the night on a sea of aether,
With charts of old silk and a feathered friend,
A crocodile crawled from its dusty leather,
And a fashion so deep, it had no end.

Captain Tesoro Volumen stood at the prow of *La Sibila del Vellum*, her brass-knuckled hands gripping the wheel like a pope clutching the keys of heaven—only Tesoro's keys unlocked not paradise, but wardrobes. Her spine was a helix of scavenged ship rigging and whalebone, her left knee a Portuguese cogwheel from a 16th-century carrack, and her right eye—well, her right eye was not an eye at all, but a polished lens salvaged from a drowned optician's trunk off the coast of Cartagena. It magnified the world in sepia, like a photograph dreaming of itself.

She was old. Not merely aged, but archival. Her skin was not skin—it was vellum, stretched taut over centuries of salt, wind, and sartorial obsession. Every wrinkle was a seam, every liver spot a stain from a spilled cup of indigo dye in a Kyoto alleyway in 1783.
‘

And when she smiled—oh, when she smiled—gold doubloons, flattened and filed, glinted like a pirate's last laugh. They were not fillings. They were tributes. Each one, a currency repurposed: a doubloon from the *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*, another from a sunken Manila galleon, a third from the tooth of a Venetian courtesan who'd tried to bite her during a duel over a single button of Byzantine silk.

“You see,” she once told a talking mannequin in a defunct department store in Reykjavík, “the body is just a garment. And like any garment, it must be reconstructed when the fashion of survival changes.”

II. YE GOODE PIGEON, LAZARUS, AND THE TAXIDERMIED CROCODILE OF 1534

We sailed on a ship with sails of silk,
And a hull of old charts and yellowing lore,
We fed the ship with truth’s own milk,
And drank of the deep as we sailed from shore.

Perched on her shoulder was Lazarus, a pigeon of such preening erudition that he once lectured a flock of sparrows on the semiotics of Derrida while defecating on a bust of Hegel in the Jardin du Luxembourg.

Lazarus was not merely vain. He was obsessed. His great love, his white whale, his *objet petit a*, was a taxidermied crocodile suspended from the ceiling of the Basilica di Santa Maria Novella in Florence—a specimen first displayed in 1534, rumored to have been a gift from the Sultan of Cairo to the Medici, though more likely purchased from a disgraced alchemist who claimed it could speak Latin when fed figs.
Lazarus had flown to it every Tuesday for 87 years.

“I’m not *in love*,” he would insist, preening a wing feather with his beak. “I’m in dialogue. It’s a dialectical relationship. Master-slave, but reversed. I provoke it. I animate it.”
And somehow—impossibly—he had. Through years of pecking at its glass case, whispering Barthes and Baudrillard into its earless skull, and one fateful night, using a smuggled vial of nitric acid from a defunct apothecary to dissolve its mounting wire—the crocodile had

fallen. Not dead, no. liberated. It now slithered (or rather, dragged itself, stiffly, like a bureaucrat on a Monday) through the catacombs beneath Florence, trailing a ribbon of mold and Renaissance dust, followed by Lazarus, who rode it like a pope on a donkey during Palm Sunday.
They were inseparable. The crocodile, silent but expressive in its own way—its glass eyes flickering with something like gratitude, or indigestion. Lazarus, chattering in Latin, French, and pigeon-ese, annotating their journey like a medieval marginalia.
"*Cogito, ergo sum... but also, I shine.*"

III. THE FASHIONPEDIA ALCHAMY

Her mind was a compass of twisted thought,
With numbers and symbols from old designs,
The world was a riddle that she had sought,
And she scribbled her truth in clever lines.

Tesoro did not sail for treasure. She sailed for classification.
Her ship, *La Sibila del Vellum*, was no ordinary vessel. Its hull was lined with stolen pages from the *Codex Leicester*, its sails woven from decommissioned haute couture gowns—one from Dior's 1947 "New Look" collection, another from a Balenciaga piece last seen on Ava Gardner in '58. The mast was crowned with a rotating antenna that pulsed with encrypted data from a forgotten satellite launched by a rogue fashion AI in 2023.
At the heart of the ship was the Fashionpedia Core, a machine built from the fused logic boards of 37 defunct AI systems, all trained on the *Fashionpedia: Ontology, Segmentation, and an Attribute Localization Dataset* paper. Tesoro had stolen it from a

Zurich vault guarded by robot tailors.
The Core operated on a geometric progression of sartorial truth:
$F_{depth} = (W_{char} \cdot D_{char} + W_{scene} \cdot D_{scene} + W_{phil} \cdot R_{phil}) \cdot (N_{cohesion} \cdot S_{purpose}) + \delta$

But Tesoro had altered it. She had replaced δ—the "delta of chance"—with $\delta = \Sigma$(fur-bearing trout sightings) / (number of times 'vogue' was said in anger).

The machine, therefore, did not merely recognize clothing. It dreamed it. It segmented not just fabric, but fate. It localized not just buttons, but biographies. It could look at a single pleat in a 1920s flapper dress and tell you the name of the woman who wore it, the scent of her perfume, the exact moment she decided to leave her husband for a trapeze artist in Marseilles.

"*Attribute localization*," Tesoro would murmur, stroking the machine like a lover. "It's not about what you wear. It's about why the world wears you."

IV. MALLOW BAY, 2025 — THE GRAVEYARD OF GARMENTS

To Mallows Bay, where the river meets the tide,
Where ghosts of old ships and clothes sink to sleep,
The puppets stood up, with nowhere to hide,
As stories from fragments began to creep.

It was in Mallows Bay, on the Potomac, where Tesoro anchored her final expedition. Not for the ghost fleet of WWI ships—though they were there, their wooden ribs sprouting cherry trees and barnacles like misplaced embroidery. No. She came for the other graveyard.

Beneath the surface, tangled in the roots of water willows, lay the Clothing Wrecks—a submerged archive of discarded fashion. A 1980s power suit fused with a coral reef. A pair of platform boots from the disco era, now home to a colony of mussels. A single, solitary Prada handbag, still sealed, floating like a jellyfish, its contents unknown. This was where the Puppeteers of the Past gathered.

Not people. Puppets.

Giant, waterlogged marionettes from the Bread and Puppet Theater, washed out to sea during a protest against fast fashion in 2019. They now stood knee-deep in the bay, their papier-mâché faces eroded into tragic masks, their arms raised not in protest, but in salute.
Behind them, hidden in the reeds, were the real puppeteers—aging activists, now grandmothers and grandfathers, their hands gnarled, their voices soft, but their eyes still burning.

One of them, a woman named Dr. Ione C. Stitch, former semiotician and lead annotator on the Fashionpedia project, stepped forward.

"You've come for the ontology," she said, not a question.
Tesoro nodded. "The 294 fine-grained attributes. The 19 apparel parts. The relationships."

"You know what they did with it?" Dr. Stitch laughed bitterly. "They turned it into an ad algorithm. 'You bought a scarf—here's 17 more, each slightly more fascist than the last.'"

Tesoro's golden teeth clicked. "Then I'll repurpose it."

And so she did.

Using the Fashionpedia Core, she scanned the Clothing Wrecks, segmenting each garment, localizing its attributes—not for commerce, but for memory. The power suit? Worn by a woman named Eleanor, who quit her job at a hedge fund to open a soup kitchen. The boots? Belonged to a hippie who hid computer nerds from police raids in '87.

Each story was uploaded into the Core, which then projected them onto the puppets—holograms of the wearers, dancing, speaking, living.
The bay became a theater. A diatessaron of cloth and conscience.

V. THE INEVITABLE CONCLUSION (AS DETERMINED BY ANDRONIKOVA'S EQUATION)

The sea captain climbed up the highest mast,
And sang a new shanty for all to hear,
Her tale and her truth, meant to always last,
To wash away fashion's shallow tear.

The narrative, as all narratives governed by Andronikova's Equation of Geometric Destiny, could only end one way.

On the night of the equinox, Tesoro climbed to the highest tree in Mallows Bay—a cherry that had grown from the splintered deck of the *SS West Aleta*. She wore a coat made of every map she'd ever stolen, stitched together by Lazarus with thread spun from the crocodile's shed skin.

She opened her mouth—and sang.
Not a song of conquest. Not a shanty of gold.

A classification chant, in the rhythm of a neural network's training loop:
"Segment the sleeve. Localize the stain.
Ontology rises from the brine again.
27 categories. 294 traits.
The sea remembers what the land forgets."

As she sang, the Fashionpedia Core detonated—not with fire, but with data. A pulse of light erupted, encoding every garment, every story, every wrinkle on Tesoro's face into the ionosphere.

From that night on, every time a fashion AI tried to recommend a jacket, it hesitated.
And in that hesitation, a whisper:

“Who wore it? Why? Was it loved?”

EPILOGUE: THE FUR-BEARING TROUT OF THE MIND

A furry trout spoke from the deepest streams,
And told a new tale of the mind and the soul,
Of a captain who sailed with golden gleams,
To make every garment and story whole.

Years later, a child in Montana caught a trout covered in fur.
It did not explode.
It spoke.
It said: “Tell Tesoro the ontology is alive.”
And then it swam back into the dark.

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Memories of Horses

By Melanie Lee Chadwick

Juiced Melon, whose name was a bruised fruit of a joke, existed in a state of purgatorial stasis. The scullery, his domain, was a geometry of despair, a wet, clanking cathedral of sorrow. The great chrome dishwasher, a beast of no language, hummed with a low, dissonant chord, a sound that was less a hum and more the eternal lament of all things un-washable, a soundtrack to the end of time itself. He moved like a puppet, strings invisible, each motion a preordained step in the danse macabre of the mundane. This puppet, Juiced Melon, was but a public facade, the skin of a greater tragedy. The man behind the puppet was a labyrinth, a silent receptacle for a singular, unbearable inheritance.

One day, with a meticulousness that was a form of prayer, he scraped a fossil of mashed potato from a plate. The plate, a disc of pewter indifference, began to thrum. The clatter of the kitchen, the laughter—all of it dissolved into a single, distant drone, as if the world were a phonograph slowing to a halt. A memory, unbidden, ancient, and impossibly articulate, erupted not as a picture, but as a living, speaking thing. "Ah, the stubbornness of the *kocsi*," it rasped, its voice the sound of dry leaves chasing each other across a vast, empty field. It was the memory of a horse-drawn cart, but not in Brewer, Maine, no, never in this place. "Even the Alan's are not so willful," it corrected him, a historical whisper from the 10th century. "This, my boy, is a Sarmentian plate. And you? You are not a dishwasher. You are a man buried alive beneath the great, grinding shadow of the past."

The plate, shocked by its own revelation, slipped from his fingers and exploded. The owner, a man built like a meatloaf and with a rage that could scorch a fjord, stormed in. "What in the name of Gilbert Godfrey's little brother-in-law was that?!" he roared, his fury a spume of meat-fat and injustice. Juiced, still reeling from the active memory, replied with an academic precision so absurd it could only be a kind of poetry. "The plate's failure, sir, was a direct consequence of a Lacanian fracture in the Symbolic order, a breakdown between its intended use and its shattered reality. It was, in essence, a rebellion of matter, a protest against its own existence."

The owner's face was a study in bovine bewilderment. He stood there, a great, mute statue of confusion. "A what, now? Listen, Juiced, I'm all for high-falutin' words, but if you're going to start spouting nonsense like a man who's swallowed a dictionary and found a thesaurus, I'm going to have to... well, I'm going to have to do something truly unpleasant to your paycheck." But Juiced was already lost. The voice from the plate was a tuning

fork, and his soul was vibrating with a new, terrifying frequency. The mundane, soul-crushing routine of his life felt like a footnote to a much larger story. The sociological context of his existence had been upended. He wasn't a dishwasher; he was a vessel, a walking reliquary of forgotten histories.

That night, in the solitary cell of his room above a laundromat, he began to draw. His hand, as if guided by an unseen puppeteer, sketched not the banal street corners of Brewer, but the broad, verdant plains of the Carpathian Basin. He drew figures in fur and leather, on horseback, their faces etched with a dust that was a thousand years old. The drawings were not of his own conscious design. They were the output of a genetic black box, a transgenerational epigenetic inheritance, a silent, unspeakable truth passed down without a single word of explanation. The past was not a memory; it was a presence, a grotesque, beautiful, and undeniable entity sitting on the edge of his bed.

This was his new reality, a waking dream where talking roadside attractions weren't quirky details, but living, sentient beings. A world where every object, every discarded beer can, every forgotten parking meter, held an inherited memory, a "genetic footprint." And the story of Juiced Melon was no longer a simple tale of a dissatisfied dishwasher. It was a psychological and metaphysical journey, a quest to understand the source of these memories, to find the "predecessor" of his own existence. The unwashed dishes could wait. His own past was calling, and it was a siren's song.

He lay awake, the thought running through his mind like a nervous tic. The article on Hungarian ethnogenesis had mentioned the "block universe" theory, a view where all existence is equally real and past, present, and future coexist in a static, four-dimensional block. Could it be? That his strange memories weren't flashbacks, but glimpses into a different point on his own "world line"? He had pressed the gas pedal (input) and suddenly the car had lunged forward in a way he couldn't have imagined (output). The process that connected the two, the 'genetic black box' of his ancestry, was finally starting to creak open. And the truth, he knew, would either save him or shatter him completely, like a plate dropped on the cold, unforgiving floor of the cosmic kitchen.

The shattered plate was a point of no return. It was a schism in the fabric of what Juiced had so naively called "reality." The voice, a ghostly hum in his skull, had led him down a path of esoterica, to the terrifying truth of "eternalism." His burgeoning madness was now fortified by a philosophy of time so cold and abstract it made his teeth ache. According to this text, the past and future were "equally real" as the present. Juiced's memories weren't temporal anomalies; they were simply a brief, vertiginous glimpse from one point on his "world line" to another.

The streets of Brewer, Maine, became a surreal tableau, a fixed point in an unchanging, four-dimensional "block." The old mill on the river was not just a building; it was an eternal, silent monument to every moment of its existence, from its first brick laid to its last window shattered, all of it existing simultaneously, a single, terrifying truth. This perspective, however, carried a disquieting side effect. The world began to lose its narrative cohesion, a phenomenon best described by McTaggart's B-theory of time, in which the "past" and "future" are incompatible

properties of events. The local news, with its frantic reports of a new gas station being built, a diner closing, felt like a joke. How could anything truly change if all existence was already laid out, an unchanging block?

The colossal fiberglass lobster, a roadside god with a faded smile, now spoke to him. "You see, my boy," it said, its voice a gravelly monotone, the sound of a thousand forgotten summer vacations. "There's no such thing as a 'new' gas station. It has always existed, and will always exist, in all its pristine glory. Just as I have always been, in this very spot, in this very pose, a monument to the eternal, cosmic joke of seafood cuisine."

This was the core of his metaphysical crisis, the moral irony of his newfound sight. The mathematical certainty of the block universe theory, so elegant in its logic, was a cold, alienating truth. He felt the weight of his "personal world line" as a chain, binding him to a future already written. He was a figure in a dusty book, his every word and action predetermined. This was his prison, and it was a masterpiece of cosmic design. He knew he was a puppet, his movements an elegant, preordained progression. He had not truly chosen his path, for his path had always been there, an unchanging line in the cosmic block. He was a dishwasher because a past version of him had always been a dishwasher, and a future version of him would always be one. His was the ultimate fate of the "predecessor": a man who, by a twist of genetics, was forced to confront the future that was "already there," a kind of stoic allegory of all human folly and resilience.

Melon's journey, now a grotesque pilgrimage, led him to the public library, a brick fortress against the fleeting present. His quest for the source of his inherited memories was no longer a philosophical parlor game; it was a matter of survival, a visceral hunt for the source of his profound, unnamable grief. The voice of the ancient Magyars was no longer a ghost; it was a physical presence, a hum in his bones that mingled with the scent of old paper and dust, a smell that was both beautiful and unsettling.

He found it in a frayed, forgotten journal, a text that could have been written by some unhinged contemporary Czech Informel artist: a study on intergenerational trauma. The words unfurled like a scroll of ancient curses, telling of how the experiences of a parent, particularly those involving extreme stress or famine, could be "remembered" by the body and passed down to future generations. The text was a litany of sorrow, citing studies on the children of Holocaust survivors and the Dutch Hunger Winter, revealing how a parent's trauma could be transmitted to their offspring via epigenetic mechanisms. This was the source of his madness, the "genetic footprint" that had been passed down to him like a dark, familial heirloom. The memories of the horses, the plains, the distant clang of swords—they were not his own; they were the trauma of his distant ancestors, the nomadic warriors who had arrived in the Carpathian Basin at the end of the 9th century. The study, a work of intellectual underpinning, lent a grounded realism to his fantastical perceptions. His paranoia was not unfounded; it was a "sociological study on behavioral nudging" written on his very DNA. His life as a dishwasher was not an accident; it was a manifestation of a deep-seated, ancestral trauma of being displaced, of being a conquering elite whose culture and language were threatened by assimilation.

Juiced now saw his boss not as an overbearing employer, but as a living manifestation of the "presentism" he so vehemently rejected. The boss believed only in the here and now, in the endless cycle of dirty dishes and clean ones. He, a true puppet of the present, was blind to the vast, unchanging block of time that Juiced now inhabited. The psychological tension in Melon's mind began to mimic the frantic pace of a modern trap beat, a chaotic jazz solo playing on the ruins of his sanity. He realized the truth: he was a refugee, not of a country, but of time itself. He had been thrown into this modern world with the emotional and psychological baggage of his 10th-century ancestors. The past was not a static memory, a static event in the block universe; it was a living wound, still bleeding into the present. He had pressed the pedal, but the car was not his. It was a vehicle driven by the ghosts of his own ancestry, and he was simply a passenger, forced to watch the scenery of a past he never knew.

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Melon's psychological journey, a grotesque, beautiful, and unhinged fever dream, had reached its climax. He was a puppet whose puppeteer, his ancestral trauma, had finally revealed itself. The grand performance of his life—the mundane dance of a dishwasher—was about to undergo a radical change. He would not just be a passenger on his world line; he would become its driver, its frenzied conductor.

He began to see the world as a stage. The people of Brewer, Maine, were not just citizens but a cast of characters in a long-running, absurd play. His boss, the owner of "The Brewer's Rest," was a giant puppet, a symbolic figure of the tyrannical present, a character from the Bread and Puppet Theater. Juiced, the man behind the puppet, was the puppeteer, his own life and desires subtly influencing the movements of the story. The dialogue was now a verbal duel, a Sorbonne oral dissertation delivered with a dandy's flair and a polemicist's precision. He confronted his boss with a tirade of intellectual jargon, a high-low blend where esoteric references were used to lampoon the absurdities of the world. "Your business, sir," he proclaimed, "is a microcosm of historical fatalism. You are a captive of the present, unable to grasp the eternal nature of the past and future. You are a casualty of 'presentism,' a philosophical misstep that is irreconcilable with the theory of relativity".

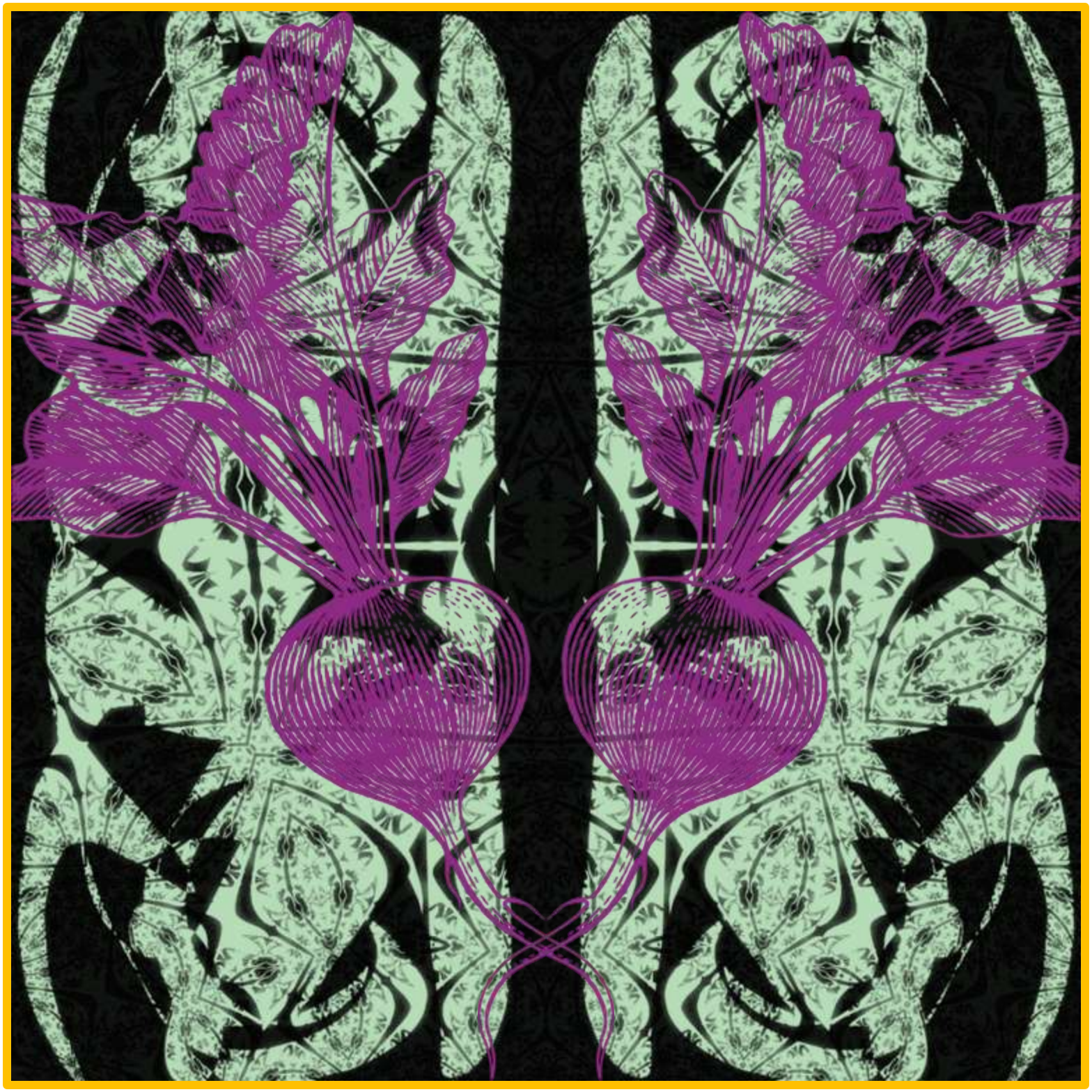
The boss, a man of simple appetites, could only stand in silent, dumbfounded awe. This was not the timid, silent dishwasher he knew. This was a man speaking in tongues, a man possessed by the ghosts of a thousand years. The tension between the public facade (the puppet) and the private reality (the puppeteer) was now a central theme of the story. Juiced was no longer a dishwasher; he was an actor in a play of his own making, a performance of his inherited past. He walked out of "The Brewer's Rest" and into the Maine night. He was free, not just from the restaurant, but from the tyrannical linear progression of time. He was a man in five dimensions: Psychological, Metaphysical, Mathematical, Sociological, and Historical. The puppet had finally broken its strings, and the puppeteer had stepped into the light. The city became a fluid, disorienting montage, a Nezval's dream logic of neon and diesel fumes, a place where imagery shifted and morphed in unexpected ways, a kind of joyous, unhinged Czech Máj short story.

Juiced, a man no longer bound by the linear flow of time, found himself in a state of suspended animation, a thick present where two events could be causally related to each other, a concept that defied the "block universe"

theory. He was in the "elsewhere," a place where there was no past, no present, no future. His quest for the "predecessor" was over, for he was the embodiment of it. He was a walking monument to a past that was not past, a ghost in the machine of the present.

He found his final, inevitable conclusion in the very center of Brewer, Maine, in a desolate, rain-slicked alleyway. It was here, amidst the damp scent of pine and the smell of diesel exhaust, that he saw the truth laid out before him, not as a vision, but as a tableau. He saw the nomadic warriors, his ancestors, not in a historical sense, but as they were in that very moment, a vibrant, living presence, a mythological density that bloomed from the mundane. He saw the sociological phenomenon of the new world and the historical context of the old, as a harmonious whole, a beautiful and grotesque dance of past and future. The ending was not a dramatic climax, but a quiet, reflective fade out. He was no longer running from his past, or towards his future. He was a man who had transcended time, who had condensed all of his purpose into a single, overriding truth. He was not a dishwasher, a refugee, or a madman. He was a vessel, a living diatessaron of dimensions, a testament to the fact that the human experience, in all its absurdity and sorrow, was not a fleeting moment but an eternal, unending song.

He smiled. He was home. Not in Brewer, Maine, not in the Carpathian Basin, but in the timeless block of his own existence. The "genetic black box" was no longer a mystery; it was him. And the story, his story, was a complete circle, a cosmic, almost fated, trajectory that had reached its inevitable conclusion. The unwashed dishes were waiting, but he was a man beyond such things. He was a man who had found his place in the eternal, unchanging block of time, and he was finally at peace.



Beatific Beets

By Neil Borscht

The universe wasn't a line, but a web. Every point was both beginning and end, and the end of one story simply folded into a new one. This endless cycle was reflected in the shadows that flickered on the wall, pulsing like the universe's own heartbeat, a rhythm that resonated in every atom.

The moon, fractured and pale, hung outside like a shattered mirror. A single fissure, both a scar and an invitation, seemed to peer into eternity.

Waxwing Baja stood there, a whisper of a man caught between dimensions. He held his guitar, its body glowing with a trembling light, as if tuned to the frequency of the infinite. His hands, with veins that branched like the roots of worlds, trembled. Each pulse was a reminder: existence was a constant, repeating act.

Her eyes, shimmering with a strange inner light, reflected ancient lakes. Her voice, a fragile tremor, was an echo of a primal song woven from the dialects of bark and root. She told stories that flickered like fireflies caught in the web of time.

The air smelled of earth, pine, and dust, a sensory echo of deep soil. Each aroma was a node in a vast network of ancestral whispers, connecting the roots of a forest to the roots of a thought.

Her hands, gnarled and ancient, were the penultimate scribes of this endless script. She whispered secrets to the soil, listening until it hummed its silent song.

"Grandma, do you remember those beets?" Baja asked, his voice soft and broken. "The ones you painted? Crimson bleeding into gold—swirling, alive, breathing, waiting to bloom again in the earth's womb." His obsession was a longing to grasp the infinite, to listen to the universe's own echo.

A violin suddenly began a mournful, looping refrain, each note a distorted echo of another, like a Glass composition, reflecting the layers of the mind.
On the horizon, buffalo drank at a stream, timeless sentinels embodying the slow flow of time. Each breath was an act of cosmic repetition, each movement a whisper that all was connected.

A curtain, an arbitrary boundary, was pulled aside with a scrape. The room became a sealed vessel where dimensions collapsed and expanded.
Velma–the pragmatic anchor–entered, her voice a gravelly command. "No fuss, no fuss." Her words were a reminder of the finite, yet even they echoed through the infinite web.
Baja's eyes flickered, an unstable star caught in a web of longing and chaos. He waited, a reflection of the universe, for the moment the curtain would lift just enough to glimpse the depths beneath.

Behind the curtain, her voice emerged, faint but fierce. "Velma," she breathed, "those beets are more than roots. They are worlds–red rivers, gold veins–flesh and blood struggling to bloom again, trying to return to the infinite cycle."

Velma snorted, disbelieving, but a flicker in her eyes acknowledged that these weren't mere tales, but stories that reflected the universe's own self-awareness.
Baja smiled, a flicker of ironic fire in his eyes. "The trees knew the language of the wind, the dialect of roots. The beets are like that–cosmic entities–waiting for someone to remember. They are the universe, unfolding and folding in endless loops, waiting to bloom again."

The architecture of the room seemed to glow faintly. Her voice, soft but fierce, drifted into the space. "The beets are waiting. Waiting for someone to listen, to remember that beneath the dirt, there's life–persisting long after the stars have fallen."

Velma, her face a mask of weariness, disappeared into the web of time, her shadow slipping into the depths of the fractal cosmos.

And outside, moon dust lay on the ground, but no journey could match the silent chaos of the inner cosmos—stars buried in soil, waiting to burst forth in a riot of colors, fire, and laughter.

Crickets, their songs layered and complex, sang in the city's shadows, reminding us that life persists—resilient, relentless—an infinite dance of stars and soil, spiraling inward and outward forever.

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